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ABSTRACT

This case study examined the separation of a community college in Hawaii from a local university where both had functioned as one for 20 years. The study used Robert Yin's model of investigating a "real-life" situation and several sources of data including: informal interviews, field notes, and archival data. In addition, the metaphor of "divorce", frequently used by many institutional members, was explored as an analytical device. Initial results showed confusion among faculty over institutional mission and priorities at both the community college and the university with the community college faculty split over the vision of the type of student they aim to produce and the university faculty struggling to balance a desire to appear friendly and open yet scholarly and learned. Also found was a high level of confusion and problems with leadership. At the community college, members lacked strong leadership which increased general chaos. Balancing competition and cooperation also emerged as an issue with both institutions competing for the same students and yet having to cooperate in the use of shared resources (library, campus center, dormitories, classroom space). Included are 18 references. (JB)

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A CASE STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL DIVORCE: THE SEPARATION OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE FROM A UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

This case study examines the separation of a community college from a university where both had functioned as one for 20 years. Both organizations struggled through an initial period of confusion to a search for a new identity and mission, which included avenues for cooperation as well as competition. The case serves as a model for other universities and community colleges faced with current shrinking budgets and questions around their respective missions, in their efforts to cooperate and compete in ways that are healthy for administration, faculty and students.

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Park Plaza Hotel & Towers in Boston, Massachusetts, October 31-November 3, 1991. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

A CASE STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL DIVORCE: THE SEPARATION OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE FROM A UNIVERSITY

Introduction

As the year 2000 approaches, both universities and community colleges struggle with the external and internal pressures that may result in institutional change. Most four year colleges and universities search for ways to best serve their students (Conrad and Haworth, 1990), to cope with shrinking budgets which contribute to a lack of facilities and space, forcing them to search for a niche in the university market (Cameron and Zammuto, 1986), and for effective ways to create a viable institutional culture and identity (Chaffee and Tierney, 1988). Likewise, community colleges struggle to establish present and future missions, to project a viable self-image and to prioritize their responsibilities to their constituencies (Deegan and Tillery, 1985; Cross, 1981). All these efforts are part of academic change, which Conrad (1975) has described as a complex process involving conflict, power exertion, administrative intervention, faculty leadership and compromise.

This case study examines the separation of a community college from its four year counterpart, both of which had formerly functioned as one institution. Although much has been written about academic change, Conrad (1975) states that none of these authors has provided a satisfactory explanation as to precisely how change occurs or who and what are finally changed at the end of the entire process. This case study will illuminate the struggles of a university and its community college counterpart to carve out

missions and curricula that are mutually beneficial to faculty and students and to examine who or what are finally changed at the end of this process.

Both universities and community colleges struggle with how best to serve the varying populations in need of higher education today: high school graduates, high school dropouts, returning adult students, racial and cultural minorities, and a burgeoning retirement population. Essentially, universities and community colleges in the same region must find ways to "divide up" these student populations through the creation of their curricula, mission statements, and the ethos or campus atmosphere created by their distinctive cultures.

This study illuminates the struggle of each institution to cope with this drastic change through attempts to define its curricular territory, divide up campus facilities, create new governance structures, establish a new sense of identity and cope with the anger, hurt and confusion that accompanies any separation or "divorce." Although the division of a university from a community college, in which both were formerly one institution is an extremely unique case, Chaffee and Tierney assert that "the stories of other organizations help provide perspective by giving frames of reference within which the reader can seek similarities and differences (1988,p.4)." Thus, this case study provides us with a microcosm of the larger issues facing other universities and community colleges in their efforts to compete or cooperate in ways that best serve students and faculty.

The objectives of this study are two-fold:

1) To study the planned organizational change process of the separation of a community college from a university where both had functioned as one for 20 years.

2) To examine the unplanned consequences of this reorganization and their impact on both the change process and the evolving organizational cultures.

Theoretical Framework

Research on planned organizational change from a cultural perspective is useful, according to Firestone and Corbett (1988), because it is a way to reexamine the local dynamics of the change process. Masland (1985) states that understanding organizational culture may provide valuable insight into the management of colleges and universities because culture appears to influence managerial style and decision practices. In addition, culture is an "unobtrusive organizational control" (Leifer, 1979), especially when explicit controls (formal regulations and direct comments) and implicit controls (specialization and hierarchy) are weak. Because colleges and universities are classic examples of organizations with weak explicit and implicit control mechanisms (Cohen & March, 1974; Masland, 1985), this case appears especially instructive as the existing culture fragments, and both institutions struggle to form distinctive new cultures.

In studying the culture of a suburban community college, Kempner (1990, p. 232) claimed that, "each college or college-type

should be assessed on its individual merits and how it integrates the needs of the community with the needs and aspirations of the students." This case examines the struggles of each college to balance community and student needs. As in divorce, these institutions grapple with whether their "parents," (the two chancellors involved) are on speaking terms, who will have custody of the children (students), and how the property (campus) will be divided. Embedded in this turmoil and an atmosphere of strong conflicting feelings are viable questions about both university and community college identity and mission.

A key issue in the division of these two institutions is the allocation of resources. Hackman (1985) points out that for the study of resource allocations, a view of colleges and universities as political organizations that operate as open systems in interaction with the environment is most useful. Central to this study is Harold Lasswell's (1950) classic definition of politics as, "Who gets what, when, and where." Ultimately, this question remains uppermost in the minds of faculty, students and the administrations of both organizations. Who will get what resources, when and on which campus, pertains to questions about students, campus space, new programs, new administrative, faculty and staff positions, as well as budgetary support for existing programs. Hackman (1985) found that a unit's centrality to the mission of an organization crucially affects internal resource allocation. Hackman found centrality to be most operative in times of economic stress, when the external resources most needed by

colleges and universities are financial. If this concept is applied to the separation of this community college and university, we should find that the programs or units that are most core or central to the emerging missions of these respective institutions will receive the most budgetary support.

Organizations act as political systems which allocate both resources, such as revenues, programs, and professionals, and values, such as the importance of learning for occupational purposes and the value of remedial instruction (Easton, 1965). In the case of these two separating institutions, important criteria for "who gets what, when, and where," are the ways in which both institutions interact with their environments, gaining or losing support from the local community, the Board of Regents, and the state legislature. As the fledgling community college emerges, questions of resource allocation will depend on the interactions this organization has with its environment. It must deal with both demands and support from the local community and the community college system as a whole.

Methodology

Design

This case study follows Robert Yin's model (1984;23) of investigating a "real-life" situation, characterized by unclear boundaries and relationships between organizations and their constituencies, and uses several sources of data. This is the first phase of a two part study which will take place over the next

five years. Phase II will commence in the fall of 1993 in an effort to measure the change process over time. Phase I of the study integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies which is intended here to strengthen the study through triangulation, defined as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Denzin, 1978;291). This particular study made use of "between (or across) methods of triangulation" (Denzin, 1978;302) which is largely a vehicle for cross validation when two or more methods are found to be congruent and yield comparable data. The premise of this design is that the weaknesses in each single method are compensated by the counter-strengths of another: thus, the weakness of not interviewing every faculty member on campus is compensated for by the strength of the survey which allowed input from eighty-five percent of the faculty.

The study relies principally on informal interviews and field notes by the participant observers, as well as heavy use of archival data such as memos, letters, minutes of meetings, and newspaper clippings. Miles and Huberman's (1984;21) method of data analysis was used, a concurrent flow of activity which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data. Data display refers to an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking. For this step, Miles and Huberman recommend the use of matrices, graphs, networks, or charts. Conclusion drawing and verification is an attempt to

decide what things mean, through the notation of regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions. This third step is only partially accomplished in this case, since we are reporting preliminary findings and final conclusions about the outcome of this reorganization may not be possible for years.

In addition, the metaphor of "divorce," frequently used by many faculty, administrators, students and community members, was explored as an analytic device. Miles and Hubberman (1984) advocate the use of metaphor to produce richer, more complete data and to decenter observations. This term vividly illustrates the affective side of questions of institutional culture, questions which are not sorted out or resolved in a vacuum, but are inextricably intertwined with organizational members' individual identities, feelings of self worth, the community's sense of identity, and their sense of allegiance or betrayal in conjunction with how the university is serving the surrounding region.

Data Source

Data were gathered through participant observation, interviews, both formal and informal, and through the use of archival data generated on campus and from local newspaper articles. Two of the three researchers functioned as participant observers in the setting over a six month period. A survey was conducted which polled the 55 faculty members of the new community college regarding their perceived needs and hopes for the future

direction of their newly forming institution. Forty-seven out of fifty-five faculty responded to the survey, resulting in an eighty-five percent response rate. Responses are reported in frequencies (numbers and percentages).

The institutions under study are located in a small coastal town in the western portion of the United States. In the fall of 1990, the combined institution enrolled approximately 4,460 students. Prior to 1990 the community college was a component of the university along with the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Agriculture. Mid-semester in the fall of 1990, the Board of Regents voted to remove the community college administratively from the university and place it under the auspices of the community college system. When this occurred, the chancellor of the community colleges charged the faculty with the task of developing a "fully functioning" community college. At present, the community college has 1657 students enrolled.

While the community college mostly serves the local community, the university has served students from around the state who want a small liberal arts college within a public university system, as well as students from other states and countries located primarily in the Pacific Rim. As of the fall of 1991, the university has enrolled 2,493 students.

Preliminary Results

Although this study examines an evolving situation and presents only preliminary results, the experiences of each

institution are instructive at this point. Three major themes are emerging from the investigation: 1) the search for a sense of identity and mission, 2) confusion and the need for leadership, and 3) balancing competition and cooperation.

The Search For a Sense of Identity and Mission

Chaffee and Tierney note that "the culture of an organization is grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization (1988, p.7)." In this case the administration, the faculty and the students of each institution all hold shared assumptions about the role and mission of universities and community colleges in society. These assumptions drive each organization's participants toward both viable and conflicting visions of how these two institutions should define themselves and their distinctive missions.

According to the Implementation Plan (1990) for the separation of the two organizations, the mission of the community college is: to provide vocational education programs which meet community needs, to provide open admission and access to students who might not yet be ready for immediate pursuit of a bachelor's degree because of remedial learning needs, to provide two years of coursework which is transferrable for a bachelor's degree, and to offer credit and non-credit courses as appropriate to meet community needs. This mission description is congruent with Deegan and Tillery's (1985) definition of a comprehensive community college, but awaits prioritization and analysis of existing

programs, because the community college sprang to life "half formed" with some programs intact and others needing developing.

Both institutions, for instance, believe that community colleges should provide remedial education for students. Guided by this shared assumption, the university has dropped any remedial efforts and the community college has taken on full responsibility for remedial education, which includes a plan for a new and vigorous literacy campaign. Whether this will best serve students or the developing self-image of the community college faculty remains to be seen.

In efforts to create a distinctive identity, the university in this case study struggles to create an image of itself as a place at once friendly and accessible, yet learned and scholarly. In balancing these two, they have raised entrance requirements, while utilizing a Freshman Year Experience program to support new arrivals to "the family." Meanwhile, the blossoming community college reaches out to remedial and older students, struggles to truly serve the community through a growing long distance learning program, through a re-examination of their trades and industries programs, and a campaign to reduce illiteracy. Having separated from the university, the new community college struggles to give birth to a new student services arm and a community services program stamped with the particular missions common to community colleges across the nation: access and community service.

In addition, questions abound regarding the extent of involvement with the business community and in what ways this

should drive the curriculum. The survey of community college faculty indicated that eighty-one percent (33) of those polled felt that programs should be responsively developed in coordination with the individual needs of growing businesses in the state. Sixty percent (25) felt this should be given top priority. Other priorities that compete with business are student services, designer programs, remedial offerings and transfer programs. Sixty-six percent (28) of the faculty felt that remedial programs should be given top priority in the development of the academic plan. Interestingly, ninety-eight percent (42) of the faculty believed that transitional relationships with high schools should be emphasized in order to better prepare students for higher education. Ninety percent (39) encouraged the community college to incorporate curricular partnerships with the high schools in the academic plan.

The faculty was split, almost sixty-forty (26-17) on whether the development of an "educated student" should take priority over occupational training. Here again, we see confusion over mission and priorities. Evidently the faculty feel both these missions can be served viably in that 100% (43) of the faculty surveyed indicated that academic curricula should have broad applicability beyond the requirements of specific occupational fields. It will be difficult for this community college to move ahead without some prioritization of its mission and further discussion of methods for accomplishing agreed upon curricular goals.

Confusion and the Need for Leadership

A major characteristic of this first stage in the development of these two institutions, as with many divorces, is confusion. Chaffee and Tierney (1988;8) assert that "administrators tend to recognize their organization's culture only when...severe conflicts or adverse relationships ensue." This appears to be true for both organizations in this study and each thus finds itself "dealing with organizational culture in an atmosphere of crisis management, not reasoned reflection and consensual change" (1988;8).

The lack of strong leadership in this situation adds to the confusion and retards the healing process. Especially at the community college, organizational members are waiting for the administration to take a strong role in contributing to the institution's sense of purpose or identity. This may prove doubly difficult as both the new provost and the dean hold acting positions in the organization. Meanwhile, the university seems to be laboring under a partial assumption that things will work themselves out over time. One university faculty member, in describing the fall registration, characterized the sense of confusion that pervades both campuses when he described the first day of classes in September as "similar to the Oklahoma Land Rush." Which students will be served by which institution remains a bewildering issue.

Conrad's theory of academic change (1975) is instructive here in understanding the ways in which power exertion of various interest groups adds to the confusion as well as clarification of

institutional mission. Conrad (1975;345) asserts that "although the goals of colleges and universities...may be stated so broadly as to be acceptable to nearly everyone in an institution, how these goals are to be achieved and precisely how they are to be interpreted is a major source of conflict between various interest groups."

Having been given the broad charge to split into two organizations, these institutions face the difficult task of interpreting precisely how this goal is to be achieved. The two institutions are experiencing virtually all of the major internal and external pressures Conrad lists as contributors to organizational conflict. Internal pressures include structural reorganization, organizational turnover and the development of faculty subcultures, while major external pressures include fluctuating financial conditions, new faculty and students, and curriculum practices at other institutions. Thus the task of sorting out respective missions and goals is massive in the face of these myriad pressures.

Administrators act as both brokers and as vested interest groups with a substantial amount of power in any change process according to Conrad (1975). Thus who has power within the academic arena and how that power is used to influence policy generating bodies will be crucial as the process of organizational change proceeds. In the case of the community college, the acting provost and dean have less power to act as a viable interest group than they would if their status were that of permanent administrators.

In addition to the confusion caused by lack of leadership, the lack of a vital student services department at the community college adds to the confusion. A survey conducted of the faculty there showed that 82% (34) of the faculty believed that students do not receive sufficient guidance or counseling in their freshman year. Given that the Freshman Year Experience Program, which did serve both student bodies, will now serve only university students, it seems evident that a strong program to serve the diverse needs of entering community college freshman should be developed. In addition, 85% (36) of the faculty respondents stated that students do not receive sufficient personal counseling services. Plans are underway to establish a students services department, which will include a dean and a secretary, a registrar and clerk, an admissions officer and clerk, a financial aids officer and clerk, and three counselors and a clerk. However, the existing counselors are embroiled in the conflict around space issues, the need to relocate, and the search for new staff. They are therefore unable to function at maximum level on the job at a time when students are confused and most in need of guidance.

Although Hackman's findings (1985) that units most central to the mission of an organization are likely to receive more budgetary support may apply, the level of confusion, shock and immobility present in the system make this impossible to ascertain at this time. In order to test Hackman's theory, it is necessary to sort out the respective missions of various units within both organizations. It is also simply too soon to know who will be

receiving which resources. As exemplified by the counselors above, in many cases these units are embroiled in conflicts regarding space allocations, the need to relocate or the search for new personnel. A sense of identity and mission has yet to be clarified.

Balancing Competition and Cooperation

The two institutions, by splitting, have increased the sense of competition for the same set of students. While both colleges compete for students and for resources, they are also forced to cooperate around the use of common library facilities, a campus center, dormitories and classroom space. A sense of competition between the two faculties, especially between the liberal arts faculties of both institutions, has existed for some time. One faculty member reported that the present situation was a threat to the professional integrity of the community college, that the faculty felt like poor relations to the university. These faculty felt the split would give them a chance to clarify their pedagogical and philosophical value, which could not develop under the old circumstances.

London (1980) asserts that community college faculty are demoralized and isolated from the larger academic culture, without a clear identity and sense of mission. In a sense, these two institutions have separated in order to improve the morale of the community college faculty, especially those teaching in the liberal arts. These faculty felt a sense of competition with the

university's liberal arts faculty in which their professional integrity was in question. Community college personnel believe that this separation will allow them to strengthen and clarify the college's pedagogical and philosophical value. Most university faculty, on the other hand, were against the split, and felt resentful of the move. One faculty member expressed his underlying resentment in this statement, "You want to split, so let's split! You take the silverware; I'll take the dishes!" In these days of increasing efforts by community colleges to establish linkages with various other constituencies, much can be learned from this need for both cooperation and competition.

One area of intense competition is the conflict over use of limited space on campus. Letters requesting or directing use of space on the campus have been received by the committee from the chancellor of the community colleges, the director of the Center for Continuing Education and Community Service, the president of the university student association and from the executive director of the student activities council. Leaks from the space committee's proceedings regarding areas under examination for relocation have caused some tension and paranoia across campus.

Students, having heard rumors regarding the possible use of the Campus Center game room as office space for the newly planned student services program of the community college, have written in vehement protest. The letter addressed to the chair of the space committee asks,

> "Why is it always the students who come up short in the end?...I don't think students will take this lying down

> or even standing up for that matter....In closing, I must vehemently voice my opposition to having the game room become a thing of the past. Office space, while it is important in accommodating the separation plan, must not be obtained at the expense of the students--again...enough is enough!"

This letter exemplifies much of the feeling on campus regarding the desire to cooperate during a time of stress and uncertainty, feelings of anger and resentment surrounding who will be asked to make the most sacrifices, that is who will win or lose in this struggle. It is obvious here that students fear they will be the losers in ways large and small. Conrad (1975;346) has stated that "there is a tendency for interest groups with power to exclude others with less power, such as administrators excluding students from the decision-making process." Every effort must be made to include the voices of students and faculty alike as issues surrounding use of space, mission and priorities are made.

Conclusion

These separating institutions provide us with a laboratory for an examination of the struggles all colleges face to clarify their identity and mission, and to learn to compete and cooperate with other institutions in ways that are beneficial to those involved. Part of this separation, as with divorce, is a struggle to establish new identities which best reflect the talents and worth of each organization's members, while simultaneously supporting higher education's nationwide agenda. Both colleges must work their way through an initial period of confusion to a search for a

new identity and mission, which includes avenues for cooperation as well as competition.

This case also seems to illuminate a "ripple effect" not addressed by Conrad in his theory of organizational change. Because the original decision to split these two institutions was made at the chancellor's level, in essence the system has completed the five steps Conrad (1975;348) lists as central to academic change: conflict, power exertion, administrative intervention, faculty leadership and compromise, resulting in policy-formation. In this case a policy has been completed which directs this college to split into two organizations. Yet at the institutional and departmental levels, the cycles of sorting out individual missions and programs is just beginning.

Evidence thus exists for a possible expansion of Conrad's theory. If academic change occurs at the upper levels of an organizational system, then a ripple effect occurs, causing lower levels of the organization to begin accompanying secondary cycles of academic change. At each level, interest groups with conflicting values form and exert pressure for change, causing the formulation of new policies which then begin the process all over again at lower levels of the organization. These interest groups conflict, compromise and cooperate until new policies are negotiated.

The first phase of this two part research project finds both institutions in a state of confusion with an accompanying need for leadership. Experiencing virtually all external and internal

pressures found in most planned change processes (Conrad, 1975), these two institutions struggle through their own anger, grief, and immobility to move on to a new sense of identity and mission. Because the community college sprang to life "half formed" it is most in need of a new sense of identity and mission. The new acting provost and the acting dean face great challenges in attempting to sort out mission priorities and form a sense of identity, in essence a new organizational culture. Questions around the relative importance of the various components of a comprehensive community college, remedial, vocational, transfer, community education and the need for a strengthened student services, still await prioritization and implementation. Feelings of anger, grief at the loss of "one community" of scholars and a sense of confusion have to some extent immobilized faculty, administration, and students. Questions about basic needs such as space, funding and personnel have taken precedence over the sorting of institutional mission.

The metaphor of divorce is instructive here because it carries both rational and affective information about the events in this organizational change process. To some extent, both organizations feel anger, fear and immobilization. As with divorce these feelings are accompanied by competition for resources, attempts to form new identities, and a search for future goals and priorities. In some cases this is not just an organizational change process, but for the individuals involved, a grief and loss experience with its accompanying feelings and stages.

Fundamental change will come slowly as it reverberates down through the levels of each organization. As with divorce, some healing, negotiation and growth must take place. Questions still remain around "who gets what, when and where" and about "who or what are finally changed at the end of this process." At present it seems that those most able to manage their confusion and resist being immobilized by the conflict over space, resource allocation and mission are most likely to move ahead, garnering resources and strengthening their existing programs. "Who or what are finally changed" may not be answered until Phase II of this project takes place several years from now.

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